

## **NPS/SCA Fire Education Program 2002**

***Facilitator: Marty O'Toole***

***Panelists:***

***Christina Stark, '02 Rocky Mountain Nature Association Fellowship - Bailey Charitable Trust***

***Lori Iverson, Grand Teton NP***

***Scott Sticha, Rocky Mountain NP***

***Jim Whittington, Bandelier NM***

### **Christina Stark**

Last summer, Christina had a research opportunity with Rocky Mountain National Park and the Rocky Mountain Nature Association, the park's non-profit partner. She chose to research what residents in the area knew about wildland fire and the park's fire program. She chose to do her research on this topic because:

- There was a nearby national forest.
- The large number of homes in the WUI.
- The high amount of fire activity that began in the 2000 fire season.
- The rising conflicts and issues related to wildland fire.

She began by looking at what research had been done that focused on knowledge, attitudes, past experience and motivation and how they might impact fire awareness in the community. She found out that previous studies proved education could be a part of fire management tools.

Her study worked in conjunction with the park's Student Conservation Association Fire Education Corps Team that went out into the community to help create defensible space around homes. While the SCA team assessed the needs of homeowners in the WUI, Christina measured the success of the SCA team by surveying to learn if SCA had changed homeowner opinions. This was done through a mixed method design: an 18-item survey and focus groups.

The results showed that 100 percent of the people contacted were satisfied. Thirty seven percent were "*Satisfied*" and 63 percent were "*Very satisfied*." One hundred percent of the homeowners thought the SCA staff were professional, knowledgeable, and friendly.

### ***Summary of Survey***

- A surprising 81 percent of homeowners felt they were responsible for protecting their home.
- A majority supported mechanical tree removal.
- A majority disagreed that prescribed fire should not be used because of smoke issues.
- A majority disagreed with the idea that prescribed burns were too dangerous.
- The cost and work prevented many people from making defensible space around their homes.
- Most people knew about fire management strategies, but wanted more in-depth information.
- Homeowners supported Rocky Mountain National Park fire management strategies, but wanted concise information.
- Homeowners thought wood removed for fuel reduction should be utilized.

### **Summaries of Individual SCA Student Conservation Fire Education Teams**

### **Scott Sticha's Rocky Mountain Team**

Christina's research documented some of the team's efforts, but Scott said the team did well. He added it would take time to get the team focused and they needed more knowledge on the NPS mission, however, they would greatly assist in informing the community during prescribed fires. He will not have formal team in 2003, but will take advantage of a grant from the Colorado Department of Forestry for a six-month information program.

### **Jim Whittington's Bandelier [Northern New Mexico] Team**

There are no homes directly on the park border that would be threatened by wildland fire, however, the park also borders the Valles Caldera National Preserve that does have WUI issues. During 2002, the SCA Fire Education Crew concentrated on the west and southwest sections of the park. Like others among the Fire Communication and Education group, Jim was out on fire a lot and did not have a lot of time to supervise the team. The team leader was replaced halfway through the summer, the new leader completed a lot of work and homeowners were very positive about their presence. He will have a 2003 team, but emphasized the need for backup supervision for the team's effectiveness.

### **Lori Iverson's Grand Teton [Teton Interagency] Team**

Lori said her team had some difficulties in the beginning, but her team leader was very strong and did a great job. She said it was important for the team leader to have separate housing to maintain the leader/subordinate role. She said it was a textbook team that staffed information tables at seven community events and accomplished a fuel reduction program at the end of their time at the park. She said she wished she had not waited until the end of the season as the project took an additional day to complete. Her team leader had a positive interview on Wyoming Public Radio, which Lori shared with the group. The local fire marshal applauded the team's efforts, but already has an effective education program. Housing is still an issue in and near Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and Lori has requested two SCA Fire Education interns for 2003.

### **Roberta D'Amico**

Roberta summed up the presentation by saying that the program really expanded in 2002, which brought some challenges. In preparing for the third year of the program the group noted some of the lessons learned from the first two years.

- The program needs more structure from SCA. Due to some confusion regarding program agreements between SCA and NPS, teams were not always aware of that a program agreement existed, therefore did not work as efficiently as possible.
- There is a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with traditional SCA interns (non-fire), which does not specifically address the fire education teams.
- There were questions regarding the \$70,000 cost for the Fire Education Corps Teams. What exactly did the money cover? There will be more definition for the 2003 teams.
- The NPS needed more flexibility in intern definition. The six-person team was not always appropriate for the situation. The options for 2003 include the original six-person team, a single fire education intern, a combination traditional conservation and fire education intern and a combination traditional conservation fire education intern that will be selected by the hosting unit.

- There is need for a second level supervisor and in 2003 there will be more flexibility and accountability for the program.

**Benefits of the program included:**

- The SCA teams count toward a park's fire contracting requirements.
- The SCA members also could be counted as volunteers.
- The SCA program is a great recruiting tool for the NPS.

The 2003 proposal includes the following host areas:

- National Interagency Fire Center / Fire Management Program Center
- Cape Cod NS
- Virginia Partnership Crew
- Ozark NSR
- Indiana Dunes NS
- Teton Interagency
- Flagstaff Areas
- Bandelier NM (2)
- North Cascades NP
- Lassen Volcanic NP
- Point Reyes NS
- Golden Gate NRA
- Pacific Great Basin Support Office
- Santa Monica Mountains NRA
- Sequoia and Kings Canyon NP
- Great Basin NP